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THE PHANTOM CASTLE.

By Henry H. Clements.

Somewhere in the forgotten chronicles,
I know not where, the musty tome is now,
For Time will Act, as nothing else can act,
Causing obliviousness of e'en itself,--
A tale is written of a Castle grand,
Whose lofty towers shadow all the land;
The Lord was absent, and the lady fair,
In Holy Quest, at the soft evening's hour,
Sought the dim sanctuary of her Church for prayer,--
Her path was girded by a great Sea-wall,
Where Ocean's thunder blast on blast awoke,
Till the strange stillness of the scene and tent,
A fearful meaning to the roaring space,
As twilight deepen'd, like a sorrowing face,
She entered the Church door, and there knelt,--
Amazement drowning utterance at the sight--
Arm'd men before the Altar near the rail.
Undaunted still, she trippeth adown the aisle,
A fairy vision of the Holy place,
Like blossom wafted o'er an orchard lawn,
And bade them to be gone. A flash of steel,
That shone like flame and spoke of bloody deeds,

His instant at her breast and check'd her way;--
As only films of foams, she dash'd them through,
Climbing the altar stairs;-- One ruthless Knight,
With breast all barr'd to kindly sympathy,
Drew forth his sabre, and cut off her hand.
She fled beyond the altar thro' a door,
Draped by a curtain-- like a serpent he,
The great hand-hewer also glided there,
To track her through the crimson of her way.
He only push'd aside the hazy screen,
And there stood palsied at what he beheld;
Floating upon the bosom of the air,
And waving to and fro, to guard the door,
A hand of clotted gore was in the way,
Threatening and ghastly as a shade of death;
He could not turn his gaze from the sad sight,
And when he would retire, it beckoned him,
With awful invitation slow and grand,
As deeds must follow, as by lodestone drawn,
Pilotless to sad destiny and frowzy fire,
Repugnant and still clung to the heart's core.
The bloody hand retired as he advanced,
Keeping its swaying poise upon the air
As swallows flit across the sky at eve,
When gladly flying homeward to their young!
Down a stone staircase, leading to the Sea,
That ruddy hand kept beckoning him away,
Unto the solitary cliffs away!--

The death-pall shivering thro' the silent night.
They came upon a chasm where the sea,
Threaded a narrow gorge and writh'd itself,
To shapes of ghostly mist above each bank,--
The hand went over beckoning him to cross,
With one wild leap he ventured to obey,
And fell a bloody mass adown the crags,
As from a rope-loop stretched from ship to shore,
The sailor drops into his Ocean grave!
The hand sank slowly on the dewy ground
The miracle was ended!
The Church's prayer, that she would linger out,
Her years, as fades a strain of music sweet,
Was answered with assent Divine.
Alike! by seas of dazzling flame lit up,
To a Memorial Column of the Church,
Kindled to saffron glow by the red Sun,
Stands the fair Lady with her hand-cropp'd arm;
She looks upon the crowd with meek, sad eyes,
The crocs themselves and shudder as they pass,
For in the gleaming of the vesper time,
A hovering image of a phantom hand,
Waves in the dimness.
Hoary with all the Moond-marks of old Time,
Enlarg'd to fullest growth, a Castle stands,
Equipped in moonlight, liv with fringed fires,
Cheering the heart of night, till one mistakes,

For the flush'd coming of obedient dawn.
But morn will come, tho' false ones mimic day
And when it came, the Castle and the Church,
Yellow'd with age, two sentinels of Time,
In all their quarried strength, thro' daylight came,
Came like a pilgrim, to the sacred spot,
Where memory wreaths the rich romantic spell,
Twined in the legend of the lady's life.
And this the lordly palace where she dwelt.
'Twas ere the Saxon or the Norman time,
In days of old Canute, the heathen King
When sword-blades flash'd before all Christian eyes,
And scores of men, fled from his awful ire;
The Christian baron's wife defied their steel,--
Routed the tipsy horde in the Church-aisle
And drove them frenzied, with the Phantom Hand!

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